Gerber Family Was Farming and Banking Family

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The Gerber family has been an essential part of the Fairbury farming and banking community for several generations. The story started with John Gerber's birth in Langnau, Switzerland. Around 1847, he married Mathilda Zimmerman from Stuttgart, Germany. She was 37 years old when she married John Gerber. They emigrated to Rittman, Ohio, about 20 miles southwest of Akron. John and Mathilda Gerber had five children.

In 1853, John and Mathilda Gerber moved their family to West Bend, Iowa. John Gerber's father, John M. Gerber (1803-1879), and his wife, Elizabeth Steiner (1812-1855), were already living in West Bend. John Gerber was expecting his father to meet them when they arrived, but he was not there. John Gerber left his sick wife and five children with friends in West Bend. His two young boys wanted to go with him to find their grandfather. John Gerber told the boys they could not go with him, but he would return soon after he found his father.

Unfortunately, while he was walking looking for his father, John Gerber died in 1853 in Iowa. His friends placed his body in a homemade "casket of the box." His five children were told not to tell their mother about their father's death because she was too sick. One of the boys, five-year-old John Gerber Sr., peaked into the room where his father's body was in the casket. This young boy never forgot the sight of seeing his father for the last time.

The Gerber family moved to Morton, Illinois, in the late 1860s or early 1870s. One daughter married, but the other two daughters never married. Both sons married.

One of the sons, Christian Gerber, married Barbara Roth in Peoria, Illinois, in 1872. He was 23, and she was 24 when they married. Christian and Barbara Roth had six children. Unfortunately, two of the six children died as children. Daniel Gerber died in March 1880 when he was six years old, and Joseph Gerber died in December 1880 when he was two years old.

Two daughters never married. Anna Gerber died in Fairbury at the age of 76. Lydia Gerber died in Fairbury at the age of 100. Katherine "Katie" Gerber married Peter Schaffer Sr. (1883-1968). They had eight children. She died in 1978 at the age of 92.

In 1875, Rev. Gerber and his family moved from Morton to Belle Prairie Township, south of Fairbury. According to Benjamin Nussbaum's South Side Apostolic Christian Church history pamphlet, the original ministers of the South Side church were Rudolph Leuthold, Peter Sommer, Nick Wanner, Henry Ziegenhorn, and Christian Gerber.

In 1910, at the age of 62, Rev. Gerber was working in his hayfield. He was walking and driving the head team of horses hitched to a hay loader. John Hoerr, who was working with the hay loader, noticed the absence of Rev. Gerber. The horse team went by, and Mr. Hoerr saw the horse lines were dragging on the ground. Mr. Hoerr then noticed that Rev. Gerber had fallen to the ground. In just a few more minutes, Rev. Gerber passed away.

In 1914, Chris S. Gerber, son of Christian and Barbara Gerber, married Laura M. Yoder. He was 26, and she was 24. Chris and Laura Gerber had eight children and farmed south of Fairbury. In 1912, Chris Gerber built the first round barn in the area on his farm about eight miles south of Fairbury. The round barn burned down in 1957. Chris S. Gerber died in 1971 at the age of 83.

In 1873, John Gerber, the other son of Christian and Barbara Gerber, married Mary "Marie" Falb in Iowa. He was 24, and she was 18 when they married. John and Marie Gerber had 15 children. Unfortunately, five of these children died before they were 11.

One of the 15 children of John and Marie Gerber was Joseph Gerber (1884-1955). Joseph married Irene M. Yoder in 1907. He was 23, and she was 21 when they married. Irene Yoder was Laura Yoder's sister. The two sisters married first cousins Chris S. Gerber and John Gerber. Joseph and Irene Gerber had three children.

Joseph Gerber initially worked in the insurance and real estate field. In 1918, he helped found the Farmers State Bank in Fairbury, which later became the Farmers National Bank. At the time of his death in 1955, he was President of the Farmers National Bank.

Joseph Gerber served as a Fairbury alderman and then became the Mayor from 1923 to 1925. During his tenure, many streets were paved, and drainage systems were installed. Mr. Gerber was a member of the Board of Education, active with the Boy Scouts, and a charter member of the Rotary Club. He was 71 when he died.

Gladys L. Gerber, daughter of Joseph and Irene Gerber, never married and died in Fairbury in 2009 at the age of 99. Velda Mardelle Gerber, the other daughter of Joseph and Irene Gerber, married William J. Redlich. She died in 2005 at the age of 82.

John Wayne Gerber, the only son of Joseph and Irene Gerber, was born in 1911. John W. Gerber graduated from Fairbury Township High School in 1929. He then attended the University of Illinois. Mr. Gerber then graduated from the University of Banking School in Madison, Wisconsin. He later graduated from the Executive Banking School at Harvard University.

John W. Gerber started working for his father, Joseph Gerber, in 1930 at the Farmers State Bank. He married Helen Theodora Olson in 1941 in Duluth, Minnesota. He was 29, and she was 26 when they married. Helen had graduated from St. Luke's Hospital nurses program in Duluth and worked as a surgical nurse until she married John W. Gerber. John and Helen Gerber had four children.

When Joseph Gerber died in 1955, John W. Gerber became the President and Chairman of the board for Farmers National Bank and changed its name to Bluestem National Bank.

Warren Olson, born in 1935, was a brother to Helen Gerber. He was in the banking business and graduated from the Banking School in Southern Illinois. Warren took a job working for his brother-in-law, John W. Gerber. In 1964, Warren Olson married Peg Vaughan in Fairbury. Warren Olson eventually became a Bank Director, and he died in 2010 at the age of 75.

J.W. "Bud" Gerber, son of John W. Gerber, continued the family banking tradition at the Bluestem National Bank, which was sold to the Bank of Pontiac in 2012.

For many generations, the Gerber family has played an essential role in Fairbury's farming and banking community.

Joseph Gerber (1884-1955) motoring around in Fairbury in his 1911 automobile.